



# Children's Law Center of Los Angeles

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## **PRESERVING QUALITY OF LIFE FOR YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE** **(Newly enacted Welfare & Institutions Code Sec. 362.05)**

Assembly Bill 408, effective January 1, 2004, seeks (in part) to improve all foster children's access to age-appropriate enrichment, extracurricular and social activities.

### **Ultimate Goal**

Ensures that **every foster child's quality of life** not be compromised simply by virtue of their foster case status. Foster children are to have access to, and be able to participate in, age-appropriate extracurricular, enrichment and social activities.

### **The Law**

**Quality of Life:** Establishes the right of all foster children to live as normal a life as possible and participate in age-appropriate extracurricular, enrichment, and social activities (WIC 362.05).

- State and local regulations may not prevent or create barriers to participation in these activities
- Each state and local entity shall ensure that the private agencies providing care to foster children have policies that promote and protect the ability of children to participate in age-appropriate extracurricular, enrichment, and social activities
- Caregivers have an obligation to allow children in their care to participate in age-appropriate extracurricular, enrichment and social activities
- Caregivers are expected to make normal day-to-day parenting decisions and are to act as a prudent parent in determining whether to give permission for a child to participate in any of these activities. In particular, caregivers shall take reasonable steps to determine the appropriateness of the activity in consideration of the child's age, maturity, and developmental level.

## **California Permanency for Youth Project**

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The California Permanency for Youth Project (CPYP) started January 2003 as a result of a three year grant awarded by the Stuart Foundation.

**Project Vision:** To achieve permanency for older children and youth in California so that no youth leaves foster care without a lifelong connection to a caring adult.

### ***Project Objectives:***

1. To increase awareness among the child welfare agencies and staff, legislators and judicial officers in the state of the urgent need that older children and youth have for permanency;
2. To influence public policy and administrative practices so that they promote permanency
3. To assist four specific counties and the private agencies with which they work to implement new practices to achieve permanency for older children and youth.

### ***Project Activities:***

***The Permanency for Youth Task Force*** The Task Force is a statewide group with broad representation, including public and private organizations, youth and funders, which grew out of the 2002 Convening on Youth Permanency.

Task Force objectives are:

1. To facilitate collaborations between public and private agencies to achieve permanent lifelong connections for youth in the system;
2. To create opportunities for key stakeholders ( who affect outcomes for youth in the system) a. to realize the need for permanent lifelong connections for youth and b) to understand that it is possible to achieve these connections;
3. To identify and overcome structural barriers (within the system affecting youth) that prevent achieving permanent lifelong connections; and
4. To promote public relations, education and advocacy efforts that will address the needs of youth for permanent lifelong connections.

In November 2003, CPYP received a grant from the Walter S. Johnson Foundation to pursue the partnership objectives of the Task Force. The grant supports the work of three workgroups addressing issues of partnership between public child welfare agencies and a) the courts, b) group homes and c) adoption/family foster agencies. The groups will make recommendations on how effective partnerships can accomplish improved permanency outcomes for foster youth by November 2005.

***Technical Assistance to Counties*** The project works with four counties, San Mateo, Alameda, Stanislaus, and Monterey, to develop programs to achieve permanency for

more youth. County teams include representatives from the Independent Living Skills Program, Family Reunification, Foster Care, Adoption and private agency partner(s), as well as significant youth involvement. The project a) provides counties with technical assistance over two and a half years as they strengthen their efforts and b) will document significant lessons about implementation useful to the field. Each county has developed a youth permanence plan that includes the following target areas: administrative practices, permanency practice, identification of project target group, staff development, partnerships, and integration with other initiatives.

**Training** An existing curriculum on Permanency for Youth is being revised for use by California counties and will be made available to all public child welfare agencies in the state in 2005. In conjunction with the California Youth Connection (CYC) and the Bay Area Academy, the project supported the development of "Digital Stories" on permanency by current and former foster youth which are available from CPYP and can be used in training. Two of these Digital Stories can be viewed on the website [www.cpy.org](http://www.cpy.org) and the full set of 10 are available through the CPYP office at 510-268-0038.

**Convenings** As a part of the development of CPYP project, a national convening was held in April 2002 to explore the issues of permanency for youth. As a follow-up a second convening was held in April 2003 and a third in April, 2004. An April 2005 convening will also be held. Please see website for summaries of 2002 and 2003 convenings, which contain information on the state of youth permanency nationally.

The project will also hold California convenings to promote partnerships to assist the state in accomplishing permanent lifelong connections for youth in its systems, i.e., group homes, mental health, foster family agencies, adoption agencies and the courts.

**Documents** To increase awareness of the issue, the project has developed two documents published in April 2004. Both are available on the website [www.cpy.org](http://www.cpy.org) and through the CPYP office at 510-268-0038.

1. **Model Program for Youth Permanency:** A report on nine exemplary permanency programs throughout the U.S. and explanation of the critical elements of such programs.
2. **Youth Perspectives on Permanency:** An exploration of youths' perspectives on permanency through a focus group process in partnership with the California Youth Connection (CYC).

**Evaluation** To measure results, CPYP is gathering data over time from workers in each county on the young people being targeted for youth permanency services. In addition, the project is doing a formative evaluation of each county's implementation process that will inform the field of strategies for implementation and change.

**Website** The project website is [www.cpy.org](http://www.cpy.org). It includes a program description, staff bios, digital stories, updates on the CPYP counties, convening reports and other interesting information.